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Europeanization and the Regions:  
The Case of the UK and Poland

Summary

The aim of this text is to answer the question to what extent European integration influenced the creation and functioning of the regions in two countries: United Kingdom and Poland. The hypothesis is, based on model of different sources of regional power by A. Bourne, that in both countries the EU impact strengthened regional powers. European integration is shown as one of the factors triggering decentralization reforms in both countries. A pro-regional shift in national politics is explained as a sign of Europeanization of administrative structures and political priorities. There is evidence that European integration empowered regions in the UK and Poland. Sub-national authorities received new competencies, especially regarding regional policy implementation, and can use new channels of participation in the formulation of EU policy. Even if central governments remain to be gatekeepers between regional authorities and the EU, the regional profile has been boosted.
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Keywords
region, regional power, europeanization, devolution, Poland, United Kingdom

Europeizacja regionów na przykładzie Wielkiej Brytanii i Polski

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego tekstu jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, do jakiego stopnia proces integracji europejskiej wpłynął na pozycję regionów w systemach politycznych w dwóch wybranych krajach: Polsce i Wielkiej Brytanii. W tekście przywołano model ilustrujący różne źródła siły regionów, opracowany przez A. Bourne. W świetle tego modelu integracja europejska ukazana jest jako jeden z czynników sprzyjających decentralizacji i wzmocnienia siły regionów. Analiza poszczególnych aspektów potencjału regionów pozwala na stwierdzenie, że europeanizacja spowodowała przekazanie nowych kompetencji władzom regionów i umożliwiła im wykorzystanie nowych kanalów oddziaływania na formułowanie polityki regionalnej, tym samym wzmocniając znaczenie regionalnych struktur władzy zarówno w Polsce, jak i Wielkiej Brytanii.

Słowa kluczowe
region, potencjał regionalny, europeanizacja, dewolucja, Polska, Wielka Brytania

Introduction

It is agreed that there is no single model of regional governance in the European Union (EU) – since it is a sovereign issue of the Member States, the EU does not impose any institutional model, putting emphasis in regional policy on process and outcome\(^1\). Therefore, forms of regionalization differ from administrative reform, which leads to decentralization of public administration (Polish case) to

\(^1\) G. Sasse, How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub-National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 2.
federalism, whereas devolution is a solution somewhere in the middle, with a dominant nation state and federal-style autonomy rights (British case)\textsuperscript{2}.

The EU leaves the Member States freedom to choose the institutional form of regionalization and the central government seems to be the most important actor in this process. The aim of this text is to answer the question to what extent European integration influenced the creation and functioning of the regions\textsuperscript{3} in two countries: the United Kingdom and Poland. On the basis of a model of different sources of regional power by Angela K. Bourne, the hypothesis is that in both countries the EU impact strengthened regional powers. European integration is shown as one of the factors triggering decentralization reforms in both countries. A pro-regional shift in national politics is explained as a sign of Europeanization of administrative structures and political priorities\textsuperscript{4}. A comparison of the two countries is presented to show similarities and differences in the impact of European integration on different sources of regional power.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE CREATION OF REGIONAL STRUCTURES

For the sake of clarity, there is a need to shed light on existing regional structures in both countries. In Poland, the first attempt towards decentralization – independent of the influence of European


\textsuperscript{3}The region is understood as a system of institutions, social and economic relations and actions, related with a particular territorial, political, functional space; definition after: M. Keating, Les régions constituent-elles un niveau de gouvernement en Europe?, [in:] P. Le Galès, Ch. Lequesne, Les paradoxes des régions en Europe, Paris, La Découverte, 1997, p. 19-20.

\textsuperscript{4}Europeanization can be understood as incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics; after: R. Ladrech, Europeanization of domestic politics and institutions: the case of France, „Journal of Common Market Studies“, 32 (1), 1994, p. 69.
Communities – was undertaken in 1990, when local units of territorial self-governments (communes) were created. This was only the first stage of the reform since the EU membership implied a need for stronger self-governance structures. After a long debate, the reform of state administration entered into force on 1 January 1999, establishing 16 new provinces, 373 counties and 2489 communes.

In the UK, in response to growing nationalist tendencies, devolution was brought to the political agenda by the minority Labour government in the 1970s, but it failed in referendums. After 20 years, the Labour’s Party government launched a constitutional reform, this time approved in referendums in Wales and Scotland. Devolved institutions included legislatures in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and executives in the first two cases. The British model is described as asymmetrical regionalism due to the lack of devolution in England.

In Poland, like in other post-communist countries, regionalization was pushed mainly by national policy makers with a mere contribution from ethnic groups or civil society organizations. It can be regarded as endogenous development towards democracy, debated since the 1980s, also in other post-communist countries regionalization, and it became a salient issue within the context of EU accession. On the other hand, Poland also experienced adaptational pressures regarding the EU conditionality criteria. Chapter 21 of the accession negotiations, titled ‘Regional Policy and Co-ordination of Structural Instruments’, required „Member States to create an ‘appropriate legal


7 G. Sasse, How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub- National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 28.

framework’ allowing for the implementation of specific provisions, an approved ‘territorial organization’ based on NUTS classifications, with a programming and administrative capacity and sound financial and budgetary management”\(^9\). Nevertheless, the perspective of „EU membership influenced the form and timing of the reform, but it was a reinforcement of an existing trend rather than a trigger for change”\(^10\).

In the UK, regionalization was mainly a product of movements from below, not related with the process of European integration. It was supposed to be a solution for domestic problems – nationalist and separatist sentiment in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland\(^11\). The impact of the EU, mainly through the cohesion policy, is modest. Even after the 1988 structural funds reform, introducing the partnership principle, central government still plays a role of a gate-keeper in the relations between the Commission and local authorities\(^12\). As Ian Bache and Rachel Jones states: „There was no evidence that the EC structural policy had caused anything but the most superficial change in domestic territorial relations”\(^13\).

On the other hand, the administrative geography of the United Kingdom is based on the system of the Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) introduced across the European Union for statistical purposes\(^14\). The UK is then divided into 37 NUTS 2 regions which act as basic units for the application of EU regional

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10 Ibidem, p. 16.


13 Ibidem, p. 16.

policies. In England, were decentralization was more constrained, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were set up under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 (instead of devolved assemblies in other regions). RDAs were designed as strategic drivers of regional economic development in their region, being responsible e.g. for promoting business efficiency, investment, competitiveness, employment and sustainable development. They performed a key role in the administration of European Funds, managing European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and socio-economic elements of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), as well as co-financing elements of European Social Fund (EFS) programmes (with Government Offices still in charge of EFS management). The Conservative – Liberal Coalition in power since May 2010 announced a reform of sub-national development scheme which would lead to closing of RDAs by the end of May 2012. Nine RDAs will be replaced by around 35 Local Enterprise Partnerships and this triggers skepticism and reasonable doubts considering difficulties in managing of spatial particularities by the Whitehall.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL POWER

The following section is focused on the impact of the European integration on different sources of regional power, applying the model created by A. Bourne.

Firstly, legal and constitutional resources should be taken into account. The EU institutional bias, privileging central governments


16 For more information please consult: http://www.englandsrdas.com/.


18 Regional power signifies region’s ability to influence decisions in its favour or its ability to control or escape the control of political actors at other territorial levels; definition after: A. Bourne, The Impact of European Integration on Regional Power, „Journal of Common Market Studies”, 41:4, 2003, p. 598.
and inducing the transfer of competencies to the EU level, is said to work against regions\textsuperscript{19}. For the Polish regions, as for other new Member States, the EU accession had an ambiguous impact. EU membership facilitated the creation of regional administrative structures but at the same time the role of new regional authorities was often undermined by the centralized nature of the accession process itself and – within the regional policy – a preference for the centre given by the Commission in the interest of greater efficiency\textsuperscript{20}. As Laszlo Bruszt states, „paradoxically, the administration of Structural Funds, which were designed to upgrade regional capacities, became factors of re-centralization”\textsuperscript{21}. That is why some authors claim that regionalization in Poland is the example of „shallow” regionalization which is strongly linked to the institutional weakness of the sub-national administrations, explained below. As for the UK, numerous competences, devolved in 1999 to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, had been already transferred to the EU level. There was therefore no substantial transfer of policy responsibilities to the EU level so the devolved executives did not perceive the EU policy making as a threat to their own competencies\textsuperscript{22}.

As for legal – administrative resources following A. Bourne, the transfer of EU-related administrative responsibilities and resources to the regions is analysed. In Poland, the pro-partnership approach to administering of EU structural funds has empowered the regions, granting them new responsibilities, and boosted the political authority and legitimacy of new units\textsuperscript{23}. They play a role in

\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem, p. 600.


\textsuperscript{23} G. Sasse, \textit{How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub-National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe}, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 25.
regional economic development by the submission of regional development plans to a medium-term National Development Plan\textsuperscript{24}. Nevertheless, for the period 2004-2006, EU funding was negotiated between the European Commission and the Polish central government and was associated in a majority with the spending of national ministries\textsuperscript{25}. Central level remains dominant for the 2007-2013 planning period with its control over 60-70\% of financial aid\textsuperscript{26}. This reflects the Commission’s re-centralization tendency, mentioned above, and is fairly understandable if we take into account the volume of structural funding and the lack of experience of new levels of sub-national government. The reform of regional policy after 2013 includes introducing a governance system engaging regional and local levels of administration to a greater extent\textsuperscript{27}.

In the UK, as it was mentioned, the introduction of partnership principle has not changed a lot in the way of implementing structural funds. Sub-national partners are indeed involved in the preparation of Single Programming Documents and in the evaluation of the programmes but the partnership remains superficial, since the programmes are run centrally as before the introduction of partnership principle\textsuperscript{28}. Nevertheless, devolved administrations have the opportunity to engage in the formulation of EU-related policies. In that sense, we can talk about the bottom-up Europeanization, with the territorial input into EU policy-making. Before devolution, it was provided by the Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Ireland Offices of

\begin{itemize}
\item M. Ferry, The EU and recent regional reform in Poland, „Europe-Asia Studies”, 55/7, 2003, p. 1110-1111.
\item For more information see European Commission, Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, Brussels, November 2010.
\end{itemize}
the UK government and their respective ministers – the Secretaries of State – holding place in the Cabinet\textsuperscript{29}. After the reforms, officials from devolved administrations are invited to the UK Cabinet Office European Secretariat which meets every Friday and gets access to all relevant EU documentation.

In terms of relational resources, European integration can also provide sub-national actors with new opportunities for regional–supranational alliances, allowing for their mobilization beyond the state\textsuperscript{30}. Regions can bypass the nation state and exert direct influence on the supranational arena independently from central authorities. Polish and British regions make use of this opportunity through their offices in Brussels (14 Polish and 29 British), delegations to the Committee of the Regions and participation in trans-regional networks and associations.

Let us now turn to another aspect of regional power, i.e. the legitimacy of regional government. In both countries, the programming framework for structural funds, based on the partnership principle, has boosted the regional profile. In that sense, the EU has enhanced the legitimacy of regional actors as decision-makers and implementers – partners in the formulation, management and implementation of EU funds\textsuperscript{31}.

In the UK, new opportunities to define regional identities in the EU cause fears that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could move away from the UK political and constitutional framework\textsuperscript{32}. Norman Davies states that the EU could be a catalyst of the collapse of the UK if the links between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} S. Bulmer, M. Burch, P. Hogwood, A. Scott, \textit{UK Devolution and the European Union: A Tale of Cooperative Asymmetry?}, „The Journal of Federalism”, 36(1), 2006, p. 79.
\item \textsuperscript{30} A. Bourne, \textit{The Impact of European Integration on Regional Power}, „Journal of Common Market Studies”, 41:4, 2003, p. 601.
\end{itemize}
weaken in favour of stronger links with the EU\textsuperscript{33}. Scotland is the most eager to search for the ally in the European institutions for its separatist idea of „Scotland’s independence in Europe“, raised in the 1980s and employed recently by the Scottish National Party\textsuperscript{34}.

As for the EU impact on financial resources in Poland, there is an asymmetry between the expanding portfolio of EU-related competencies granted by the centre to the regions and the funds available to carry them out\textsuperscript{35}. Paradoxically then, EU accession can work against the processes of power devolution in Poland\textsuperscript{36}. Without doubts, the funds flowing to the regions have increased\textsuperscript{37} but they are in majority controlled by the centre, thus regions depend on central subsidies to finance their initiatives\textsuperscript{38}.

In the case of the UK, structural funding for the 2000-2006 planning period amounted to 27 billion euros and for the 2007-2013 period, the UK has been allocated 10.6 billion euros in total\textsuperscript{39}.

European integration can also affect organizational efficiency or institutional performance\textsuperscript{40}. For the Polish inexperienced regional


\textsuperscript{37} For the 2004-2006 planning period, Poland was allocated 8.3 billion euros in structural funding. The allocation for the 2007-2013 planning period amounts to 86 billion euros, which makes Poland the largest single recipient of structural funding.


\textsuperscript{40} Those factors can be measured e.g. by the quality of administrative services, ability to introduce and implement strategic decisions in the management.
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Institutions, new responsibilities granted to self-governments were a serious administrative challenge, difficult to deal with if we consider the lack of cooperative culture, extremely weak civil society and the legacy of distrust syndrome\textsuperscript{41}. On the other hand, EU membership played an important role in the socialization – or rather Europeanization – of regional elites. They are brought into ‘European’ elite discourse through different EU fora and activities, scientific and educational exchanges, social interactions with partners from another Member States\textsuperscript{42}. They develop their cultural and social capital through trainings, exchanges and intra- and cross-regional networking\textsuperscript{43}. Similarly, in the UK, EU-related obligations on the devolved level required an increased amount of institutional resources\textsuperscript{44}. The asset of devolution was that there has been a transfer of staff from territorial offices of central government to devolved administrations, together with a transfer of knowledge and experience necessary to tackle with the EU issues\textsuperscript{45}. Regional elites are also „Euro-socialized” through participation in Europe-wide associations and cross-border initiatives.

\begin{itemize}
\item G. Sasse, \textit{How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub- National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe}, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 16.
\item S. Bulmer, \textit{British devolution and European policy-making: transforming Britain into multi-level governance}, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 44.
\end{itemize}
The EU can also affect internal regional characteristics such as political cohesion or stability. The EU supports the peace process in Northern Ireland through the PEACE Programme. Since 1989, the EU contributes also to the International Fund for Ireland which is an organization established by the UK and Ireland governments to encourage dialogue between Nationalists and Unionists in Ireland.

CONCLUSION

The essay has looked at the nature of regionalization in Poland and the UK showing the influence of the EU in two areas: firstly, the emergence of regional structures, secondly, different sources of regional power.

It is very difficult to assess if the European integration empowers, weakens or has no effect on sub-national entities in the Member States. A lot depends on the historical background and pre-existing conditions. As Peter John states,

in unitary states [such as Poland and the UK] the potential transfer of power and resources as a result of European policy is dependant on the willingness of national government to transfer functions to sub-central government.

That is why one would argue that the EU only partially influenced the emergence and powers of regions in both analyzed countries.

This influence seems to be more visible in Poland, where

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46 It is a unique instrument within the Structural Funds, aimed at contributing to reconciliation and targeted to groups and sectors „most affected by the conflict”. The programme is implemented through inclusive (Protestant and Catholic), joint (North/South of Ireland) and „bottom-up” delivery structures (locally-based partnerships, NGOs); cf. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/newsroom/document/pdf/manchesteruk.pdf.


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Regionalization can be seen as a compromise between acceptance of the requirements of EU accession, the logic of democratization including the principle of self-governance, and the striving for government control in order to secure Polish statehood^{49}.

There is evidence that European integration empowered regions in the UK and Poland. Sub-national authorities received new competencies, especially regarding regional policy implementation, and can use new channels of participation in formulation of EU policy. Even if central governments remain to be gate-keepers between regional authorities and the EU, the regional profile has been boosted.

As a conclusion one can quote Udo Bullmann, who claims that in spite of still dominant position of the nation-states, the reforms of EC regional policy seem to have enabled sub-state governments to serve as new interlocutors of the Commission. They thus also challenge the traditional monopoly of national governments to mediate between domestic and international affaires^{50}.

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